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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the types of schooling programs that will build on the strengths of educationally disadvantaged students to bring them into the educational mainstream as well as to prepare them for economic, political, and social participation. Without intervention on behalf of the disadvantaged, the following results may occur: (1) a dual society with a large uneducated underclass; (2) disruption in higher education; (3) national economic deterioration; and (4) rising costs of public services. The educational plight of the disadvantaged is outlined. Any strategy for improving their situation must begin at the elementary level, and must be dedicated to preparing students for doing high quality work in secondary school. Such a strategy is the Accelerated School, a transitional elementary school that brings disadvantaged children up to grade level by the completion of the sixth grade. The following aspects of the Accelerated School are discussed: (1) school-based governance; (2) goals; (3) pupil and school assessment; (4) nutrition and health; (5) curriculum; (6) instructional strategies; (7) community resources; (8) parental participation and training; and (9) extended daily session. The major organizational dimensions of change required for transforming schools into accelerated learning institutions are discussed, and steps to assist the transformation are suggested. An 18-item list of references is included. (BJV)

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NEW SCHOOLS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

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June 1987

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June 1987

NEW SCHOOLS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

I. INTRODUCTION

Educationally disadvantaged pupils account for almost one-third of all elementary and secondary students in the U.S.[1] Pupils who are defined as educationally disadvantaged lack the home and community resources to fully benefit from conventional schooling practices and the recent wave of educational reforms. Because of poverty, cultural or linguistic differences, they tend to have low academic achievement and experience high secondary school drop-out rates. Such students are especially concentrated among minority groups, immigrants, non-English speaking families and economically disadvantaged populations.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the types of schooling programs which will build on the strengths of these students to bring them into the educational mainstream as well as to prepare them for economic, political, and social participation. Although these students are often talented in many ways and have valuable cultural experiences and knowledge of other languages that are not shared by other students, they lack the experiences and resources that assure success in most conventional schools. They begin their schooling with lower measures of school readiness than their non-disadvantaged peers, and they fall farther and farther behind over time. By the end of elementary school they are often found to be a year or more behind their grade levels in standardized achievement, and in the latter years of high school the achievement gap is three years or even greater with dropout rates estimated at about 50 percent.

The educationally disadvantaged are not only a large proportion of overall enrollments -- approaching a majority of students in some states like California and Texas --, but their numbers are growing in all of the states. The populations from which these students are drawn are relatively young with far higher birthrates than among non-disadvantaged populations. Moreover, a wave of immigration, both official and undocumented, unprecedented since the beginning of the twentieth century is contributing to these numbers. Most of today's immigrants to the U.S. come from rural and impoverished circumstances where little schooling was provided. Additionally, the proportion of children in poverty families -- many of them female-headed -- is higher today than it was a decade ago. All of these factors are fueling the rapid upsurge in disadvantaged students, a phenomenon that has overwhelmed America's urban schools where a majority of their enrollments are disadvantaged.

Dangers of Inaction

In the absence of substantial interventions, the rapidly increasing population of educationally disadvantaged students will ultimately emerge as a large and growing population of disadvantaged adults. The potential consequences of ignoring the needs of these students will affect not only the disadvantaged, but the larger society as well. These consequences include: (1) The emergence of a dual society with a large and poorly educated underclass, (2) massive disruption in higher education, (3) reduced economic competitiveness of the nation as well as those states and industries most heavily impacted by these populations, and (4) higher costs for public services that are a response to poverty.

(1) A Dual Society

As the disadvantaged population increases without appropriate educational interventions to improve substantially its situation, this group is likely to form the underclass of a dual society.

Composed of racial and ethnic minorities and persons from economically disadvantaged origins, its members will face high unemployment rates, low earnings, and menial occupations. At the same time the political power of the disadvantaged will increase as their numbers and potential votes rise. The specter of a dual society suggests great political conflict and potential social upheaval. Economic and educational inequality in conjunction with equal political rights are the ingredients for future polarization and intense political, social, and economic conflict and instability.

(2) Conflict in Higher Education

The implications for higher education are also severe. Larger and larger numbers of educationally disadvantaged will mean that the public institutions of higher education will have to become more restrictive in their admissions criteria or more devoted to remedial academic work. Either direction is fraught with problems. Substantial remedial activities will require additional university resources, and students will take longer to complete their degrees or will be discouraged from completion. All of this means that costs to universities and students will spiral. The increase in remedial functions will alter the character of public higher education with a tendency to water-down the overall curriculum and reduce standards as pressures increase to approve the application of such courses to degree programs.

Alternatively, the universities may seek to restrict admissions through greater reliance on standardized test scores and more academic course requirements so that fewer persons from disadvantaged populations can participate in higher education. Even now a disproportionately small share of minority and educationally disadvantaged students are eligible to participate in public higher education because of their high dropout rates and poor academic records. But these disproportions will be exacerbated by creating an elite system for admissions, a result that flies in the face of the democratic mission conferred upon public systems of higher education supported by tax revenues collected from the entire population. At the same time that higher education becomes more exclusive, those who are increasingly excluded will be expanding their political power at both the state and federal levels. Clearly, such a policy will lead to political and social turmoil, both on and off the campuses.

(3) Economic Deterioration

A further consequence of the present treatment of the educationally disadvantaged will be a serious deterioration in the quality of the labor force. As long as the disadvantaged were just a small minority of the population, they could be absorbed into seasonal and low-skill jobs or relegated to unemployment without direct consequences to the overall economy. But, as their numbers grow and they continue to experience low achievement and high dropout rates, a larger and larger portion of the available labor force will be unprepared for available jobs. Here we refer not only to managerial, professional, and technical jobs, but to the huge and burgeoning numbers of lower-level service jobs that characterize the economy. Clerical workers, cashiers, and salespeople need basic skills in oral and written communication, computation, and reasoning, skills not guaranteed to the educationally disadvantaged. A U.S. government study in 1976 found that while 13 percent of all 17 year olds were classified as functionally illiterate, the percentage of illiterates among Hispanics and Blacks was 56 and 44 percent respectively.

The U.S. is already facing great difficulties in maintaining a competitive economic stance relative to other industrialized and industrializing nations. As the disadvantaged become an increasing and even a dominant share of the labor force in some state and regions, their inadequate educational preparation will undermine the competitive position of the industries and states in which they work. Employers will suffer lagging productivity, higher training costs, and competitive disadvantages that will result in lost sales and profits. Federal, state, and local governments will suffer a declining tax base and loss of tax revenues.

(4) Rising Costs of Public Services

The economic losses will come at a time of rising costs of public services for populations that are disadvantaged by inadequate education. More and more citizens will need to rely upon public assistance for survival, and increasing numbers of undereducated teens and adults will pursue illegal activities to fill idle time and obtain the income that is not available through legal pursuits.

The inability to find regular employment that pays sufficiently to overcome poverty will require greater public subsidies to overcome increases in poverty and to counter drugs, prostitution, theft, and other alternatives to legal employment. These developments will reduce the attractiveness of the U.S as a place to live while increasing the costs of police services and the criminal justice system as well as public assistance. Pressures will be placed on the middle class to pay higher taxes at the same time that their income is threatened by a flagging economy, creating an additional source of political conflict as besieged taxpayers resist tax increases.

II. WHAT IS WRONG

Since the middle 1960's the federal and state governments have provided funding and sponsored programs for improving the educational performance of disadvantaged students. Although there is some evidence that the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged student achievement has narrowed slightly in the last two decades, the gap is still considerable. Typically, the disadvantaged are performing at the 25th percentile or lower, and their probability of completing secondary school is only about fifty percent.

Although the 1980's have been characterized by a wave of educational reforms, they have little to offer the educationally disadvantaged. The reforms stress raising standards at the secondary level, without providing additional resources or new strategies to assist the disadvantaged in meeting these higher standards. Any strategy for improving the educational plight of the disadvantaged must begin at the elementary level and must be dedicated to preparing children for doing high quality work in secondary school. Simply raising standards at the secondary level without making it possible for the disadvantaged to meet the new standards is more likely to increase their dropping out.

Two of the most typical recent state reforms are the setting of minimum competency standards for a diploma and raising course requirement for graduation. Paradoxically, both of these may contribute to increasing dropouts of disadvantaged students who already have difficulty in meeting the old standards. Disadvantaged students enter secondary school with achievement levels two years or more below those of their non-disadvantaged counterparts. Even present standards are difficult to meet with this handicap. Unless this gap can be closed prior to entering secondary school, the higher standards will serve to further discourage the disadvantaged rather than improve their performance.

In this respect, the current wave of reforms may be meritorious for many non-disadvantaged students, while actually serving as obstacles for improving the education of the disadvantaged. Reforms for the disadvantaged must address their needs directly, rather than assuming that a rise in general standards will automatically solve the needs of all students.

Origins of Failure

Disadvantaged students begin their schooling with a learning gap in those areas valued by schools and mainstream economic and social institutions. The existing model of intervention assumes that they will not be able to maintain a normal instructional pace without prerequisite

knowledge and learning skills. Thus, such youngsters are placed into less demanding instructional settings -- either by being pulled-out of their regular classrooms or by adapting the regular classroom to their "needs -- to provide remedial or compensatory educational services. This approach appears to be both rational and compassionate, but it has exactly the opposite consequences.[2]

First, this process reduces learning expectations on the parts of both the children and the educators assigned to teach them, and it stigmatizes both groups with a label of inferiority. Such a stigma undermines social support for the activity, denotes a low social status, and imparts negative self-images for the participants. The combination of low social status and low expectations is tantamount to treating such students as discards who are marginal to the mainstream educational agenda. Thus, the model creates the unhealthiest of all possible conditions under which to expect significant educational progress. In contrast, an effective approach must focus on creating learning activities which are characterized by high expectations and high status for the participants.

Second, the usual treatment of the educationally disadvantaged is not designed to bring students up to grade level. There exist no time-tables for doing so, and there are rarely incentives or even provisions for students to move from remedial instruction back to the mainstream. In fact, since students in compensatory or remedial situations are expected to progress at a slower than "normal" pace, a self-fulfilling prophecy is realized as they fall farther and farther behind their non-disadvantaged counterparts. The result is that once a disadvantaged student is relegated to remedial or compensatory interventions, that student will be expected to learn at a slower rate, and the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students will grow. A successful program must set a deadline for closing the achievement gap so that, ultimately, educationally disadvantaged children will be able to benefit from mainstream instruction.

Third, by deliberately slowing the pace of instruction to a crawl, a heavy emphasis is placed on endless repetition of material through drill-and-practice. The result is that the school experience of the disadvantaged lacks intrinsic vitality, omits crucial learning skills and reinforcement, and moves at a plodding pace that reinforces low expectations. Exposure to concepts, analysis, problem solving, and interesting applications is largely proscribed in favor of decoding skills in reading and arithmetic operations in mathematics in the primary grades on the premise that these fundamentals must be learned before anything more challenging can be attempted. Mechanics are stressed over content. Such a joyless experience further negates the child's feelings about school and diminishes the possibility that the child will view the school as a positive environment in which learning progress can be made. An effective curriculum for the disadvantaged must not only be faster paced and actively engage the interests of such children to enhance their motivation, but it must include concepts, analysis, problem-solving, and interesting applications.

In addition to these shortcomings, most compensatory educational programs do not involve parents sufficiently or draw adequately upon available community resources. Parents are not viewed or utilized as a potentially positive influence for their childrens' learning. Furthermore, the professional staff at the school level are often omitted from participating in the important educational decisions that they must ultimately implement. Such an omission means that teachers are expected to dedicate themselves to the implementation of programs which do not necessarily reflect their professional judgments, a condition not likely to spur great enthusiasm. The design and implementation of successful educational programs to address the needs of the educationally disadvantaged will require the involvement of parents, the use of community resources, and the extensive participation of teachers in formulating the interventions that will be provided.

An effective approach to educating the disadvantaged must be characterized by high expectations, deadlines by which such children will be performing at grade level range, stimulating

instructional programs, planning by the educational staff who will offer the program, and the use of all available resources including the parents of the students. In addition, it should use instructional strategies particularly appropriate for the disadvantaged and make better use of time. Most important of all, the approach should incorporate a comprehensive set of strategies that mutually reinforce each other in creating an organizational push towards raising the achievement of students to grade level.

III. ACCELERATED SCHOOLS AS A SOLUTION

In addition to the concerns set out above, a solution should have a number of other properties. Goodlad (1983) emphasizes the need to work with entire schools as units of change rather than focusing on program changes within a school that is otherwise intact. Comer (1980) stresses the importance of empowering all of the participants to alter educational processes and outcomes, parents, teachers, students, administrators, and other staff. Without having some sense of being able to change their situations, it will be difficult to create effective schools. Finally, the solution must begin in pre-school or elementary school rather than in middle school or high school. Programs established at the secondary level to reduce dropouts, teenage pregnancies, and drug use must necessarily reap meager successes if students have experienced academic failure and negative school experiences in the lower grades. The solution is to aim for academic success and positive learning experiences as a pre-condition for healthy progress in secondary school.

Using these principles, we have designed an Accelerated School to transform existing schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged youngsters, a situation typically found in large cities and some rural areas. The Accelerated School is a transitional elementary school designed to bring disadvantaged children up to grade level by the completion of the sixth grade. The goal of the school is to enable disadvantaged students to benefit from mainstream secondary school instruction by effectively closing the achievement gap in elementary school. By bringing children into the educational mainstream, we mean more than bringing them up to grade level in basic skills measured by standardized tests. We are referring also to their capabilities in problem solving and communication as well as their educational aspirations and self-concept as learners. All of these need to be addressed, not just those dimensions measured on standardized tests. The approach is also designed to be a dropout prevention program by eliminating the most important single cause of dropping out, serious achievement deficits.

As reflected in the works of Comer (1980) and Goodlad (1983), the stress is on the elementary school as a whole rather than on a particular grade, curriculum, approach to teacher training, or other more limited strategy. Underlying the organizational approach are two major assumptions: First, the strategy must "empower" all of the major participants and raise their sense of efficacy and of responsibility for the outcomes of the school. Second, the approach must build on the considerable strengths of the participants rather than decrying their weaknesses.

Within the context of empowerment and building-on-strengths, the school is based upon an accelerated curriculum and accelerated instructional strategies to bring all children up to grade level and into the educational mainstream and to make students see themselves in a very positive light as productive learners with many future possibilities. The entire organization of the school will focus on this as an initial goal rather than limiting interventions to "pull out" sessions in a school where the dominant agenda addresses other goals. Over time the emphasis on school-based decisions with the collaboration of the various participants may contribute to the development of other goals as well. Table One provides a summary of the specific features of the Accelerated School that are discussed below.[3]

Table One

FEATURES OF ACCELERATED SCHOOLS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

- o School-Based Governance
- o Clear Goals
  - Students
  - Parents
  - Staff
- o Pupil Assessment
- o Nutrition and Health
- o Curriculum
  - Language
  - Mathematics
  - Other Areas
- o Instructional Strategies
  - Affective Aspects
  - Use of Time
  - Peer Tutoring
  - Cooperative Learning
  - Homework
- o Community Resources
  - Adult Tutors
  - Businesses
  - Social Service Agencies
- o Parental Participation and Training
- o Extended Session

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(1) School-based Governance

The principles set out for the Accelerated School are relatively broad ones that can be designed and implemented in a wide variety of ways. The actual choice of curriculum, instructional strategies, and other school policies will be decided by the instructional staff of the school within the latitude set by the school district. These decisions will benefit from the substantial knowledge base that exists on the various dimensions of school programs that have been shown to be particularly effective for disadvantaged students as set out below. But, the specific dimensions and their details must be considered, adopted, and molded by the school decision-makers. That is, the decision-making approach is a school-based one in which those who will be providing the instruction will make the decisions. As the school builds this capacity, it will be important to get parent representatives involved in the decision-process as well.

Each school will create its own governance mechanism consisting of a governing body as a whole as well as a steering committee and task-oriented committees with particular assignments

that will report to the steering committee and the governing body. These decision-groups will be composed of instructional staff, other staff, parent representatives, and the principal of the school. The principal will undertake an important leadership role in identifying problem areas, obtaining pertinent information, coordinating the decision process, and assisting in group dynamics. The principal will also be responsible for obtaining and allocating resources from the school district to implement decisions.

Each school will set out a program consonant with the strengths of the district and local staff. In this way, the reform will be developed by those who must implement and evaluate the decisions, a process likely to enhance professional commitment. Indeed, the ability of teachers and other school staff to work together to shape the programs that will guide their daily activities is likely to make the school dynamic and exciting from the perspective of educational staff. It is this participation and accountability which are crucial for fully engaging the talents and commitments of educators. Details on shifting responsibilities from district offices to schools and on the internal organization of schools are discussed in Levin (1987).

(2) Goals

In conjunction with the school district and school board, the governing body of the school will establish a clear set of goals for students, parents, and staff with respect to the purpose of the school and its activities. An overriding goal of the Accelerated School is to bring the academic performance of students up to grade level to prepare them for mainstream educational opportunities by the completion of elementary school. In setting overall school goals consideration should also be given to student attendance and participation in school activities; teacher attendance, participation, and morale; vandalism and behavior problems; and school contributions to the community through the performing arts and community service.

Each of the major constituencies will be consulted in setting these goals. The inculcation of school goals among students will serve to create high expectations and to improve their learning by increasing their efforts and the time they devote to such endeavors. For parents and school staff, the establishment of such goals should serve to raise expectations on the part of those constituencies in a way that will improve the instructional resource climate of the home and school. As collaboration becomes more fully established, new goals will be established and old goals may be modified.

(3) Pupil and School Assessment

An assessment system is needed that evaluates the performance of children at school entry and sets a trajectory for meeting the overall school goal. Periodic evaluations on wide-spectrum, standardized achievement tests as well as tailored assessments created by school staff for each strand of the curriculum and school goal will enable the school to see if students are on the anticipated trajectory. Such an assessment system will serve both accountability purposes as well as diagnostic ones for improving instruction. In addition, a school-wide assessment system needs to be established to measure progress towards other goals such as parental involvement, student and teacher attendance, student participation, and so on.

(4) Nutrition and Health

It is clear that the capacity of children to learn will be heavily conditioned by their nutritional status and health. Children without adequate diet and with dental and other health problems are not likely to have the concentration and feeling of well-being prerequisite to learning. Especially important are undiagnosed and untreated hearing and vision problems, since virtually all learning activities are centered around these two senses. Schools must work with families and the

various social service agencies (public and private) in the community to diagnose and address nutritional and health care needs of disadvantaged students to improve their capacity to learn.

(5) Curriculum

Major curriculum features that have been shown to be pertinent include a heavily language-based approach for all subjects, including mathematics.[4] Language use in all of its forms -- reading, writing, speaking, and listening -- must be stressed across the curriculum.[5] Emphasis will be placed on analysis, concepts, problem-solving and applications in all subjects from the early primary grades.

Especially important will be the development of interesting applications that relate to the daily lives and experiences of the children and that demonstrate the usefulness of the tools and concepts that are presented. Students will be asked to discover applications of the concepts themselves.

Writing will begin early in the primary grades, as soon as students develop even minimal vocabularies. Students will be exposed not only to narrative and poetic forms of language use, but also to exposition. Mathematics will be presented through the development of concepts and applications in order to integrate and reinforce the standard arithmetic operations. Science and social studies will also build on the development of analytical skills, problem solving, concepts, and applications in order to provide a stimulating framework for the associative learning tasks. Most importantly, the students will be active subjects in their learning rather than passive objects.

Substantial attention will also be placed on the arts and physical activities. These are not only important for full human development, but they are often sources of great intrinsic satisfaction for the participants. Thus, they can serve an important role in making the school a vibrant and attractive experience along with the other curriculum areas. The curriculum design is aimed at increasing student capacity through providing conceptual and analytical tools to enhance the capacity to learn more advanced material; expanding effort through its purposive attempt to make the school experience more engaging (Richardson 1987); improving the use of time; and raising the quality of instruction.

(6) Instructional Strategies[6]

The choice of instructional strategies must rely heavily on those that will reinforce the curriculum approach and build on techniques that have been shown to be effective with the disadvantaged. The use of time should stress greater availability of instructional time as well as more effective use. Instruction must be paced to keep students attentive and learning at a rate that is productive, in contrast to the deliberate slowdown usually associated with remedial instruction. Curriculum and teaching approaches should be used to advantage to maintain student interest and engage them in active learning. Of special importance in this regard are the techniques associated with Lozanov (1978) and the Suggestive-Accelerative Learning Technique movement as applied by Richardson (1987) to the Accelerated School.

Peer tutoring has been shown to be an unusually effective approach for disadvantaged youngsters (Madden and Slavin 1987:9-15). Among its advantages are the facts that it is flexible in allowing older children to tutor younger ones or more advanced students at the same level to tutor their colleagues, and the tutors often learn as much as those whom they are tutoring. Finally, it is an ideal strategy for heterogeneous student groupings, since those more knowledgeable are tutors to those who need to master the material.

Cooperative learning is another effective strategy for enhancing learning among diverse groups (Cohen 1986; Slavin 1983). Students are given group assignments and rewards are given

for group proficiency, providing incentives for the more able students to help those who need assistance. Group approaches seem to be relatively effective for disadvantaged students in contrast to the individual approach common in elementary schools.

The use of outside assignments or homework is important in teaching independence and self-reliance. Such assignments can be made on a group or individual basis, and they prepare students for later grades when a high proportion of learning will take place through such study. Even in the first grade students will be given such assignments. While this strategy focuses on expanding student effort and the amount of time for learning, the other instructional strategies also address the quality of learning resources.

(7) Community Resources

Accelerated schools must enlist all the resources at their disposal to accomplish their mission. Among these are adult tutors who can work with individual students and provide assistance to teachers. An especially rich source of such talent is the senior citizen population. Many of these are former teachers, who seek productive activities and social interaction. In addition, local businesses can be enlisted to provide personnel and other resources to assist accelerated schools. Social service agencies can address basic needs of families including health care, nutrition, and counseling and youth agencies such as the boy scouts and girl scouts or Big Brothers and Big Sisters can offer enrichment programs for the young after school, on weekends, and during summers.

(8) Parental Participation and Training

Parents will be deeply involved in two ways. First, all parents or guardians will be asked to affirm an agreement that clarifies the goals of the Accelerated School and the obligations of parents, students, and school staff. The agreement will be explained to parents and translated, if necessary. Parental obligations will include such supportive roles as ensuring that their children go to bed at a reasonable hour and attend school regularly and punctually. Parents will be asked to set high educational expectations for their children, to talk to them regularly about the importance of school, and to take an interest in their children's activities and the materials that the children bring home.

Parents also will be asked to encourage their children to read on a daily basis and to ensure that independent assignments are addressed. They will be expected to respond to queries from the school. The purpose is to emphasize the importance of the parental role through the dignity of a written agreement affirmed by all parties. Students and school staff will also have appropriate obligations regarding their roles, with the understanding that the Accelerated School will only succeed if all three parties work together.

Second, parents will be given opportunities to interact with the school program and to receive training for providing active assistance to their children. Such training will include not only skills for working with a child, but also many of the academic skills necessary to understand what the child is doing. In this respect, it may be necessary to work closely with agencies offering adult basic education to provide the parental foundation. The parental dimension can improve the capacity and effort of the child as well as increase the time devoted to academic learning and provide additional instructional resources in the home (Epstein 1987; Kelly and Smrekar 1987).

(9) Extended Daily Session

An extended session until 5 P.M. will provide additional learning time for the youngsters. Following the ending of the normal school session in early or mid-afternoon, the extended-day program will provide a rest period, physical activities, exposure to the arts, and a time for doing

independent assignments or homework. During this period, college students and senior citizen volunteers will work with individual students to provide learning assistance. Since many of the children are "latch-key" children, the extension of the school day is likely to be attractive to parents. The variety of activities will address all four components of student learning, capacity, effort, time, and learning resources.

IV. SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITIES TO INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

The Accelerated School represents a profound departure from the traditional approach used to educate the disadvantaged. As such, it requires substantial changes in the ways schools operate and decisions are made. In this section, we will address some of the major organizational dimensions of change required for transforming schools into accelerated learning institutions. In the next section we will focus on a range of other issues for initiating the establishment of Accelerated Schools.

School-Based Decisions

In order to understand have school-based decisions contribute to the education of the disadvantaged, it is important to note why such schools must have a large amount of discretion in making decisions affecting their students. First, every school and group of students has unique strengths and other characteristics. In order to make educational decisions particularly responsive to their needs, major decisions should be made at the school level -- within district guidelines and goals. The farther decisions are removed from the classrooms and schools where they must be implemented, the less sensitive they will be to the specific needs of students and schools.

A second reason in favor of school-based decisions is that it is important for the school to take responsibility for educational outcomes. When school staff have little power to affect the planning, design, and evaluation of educational activities, instruction becomes a litany of mechanical activities prescribed by the policies, practices, procedures, curriculum, and materials set out at higher levels. Such an arrangement reinforces teacher insensitivity to actual student needs as teachers learn to follow standard procedures and lose a sense of responsibility to change things. One could even argue that the present arrangement inures teachers to the particular needs of their schools and students, since they can do little to alter conditions to satisfy those needs.

A shift of decision making and responsibility from the district level to individual schools could reverse this trend by increasing the authority of teachers to participate in decisions in conjunction with other staff and parent representative to take major responsibility for their students' performance. Commitment to a work activity at a complex and professional level is best obtained when the persons implementing those activities participate in the design and in the evaluation of the outcomes. In this way, teachers can take more responsibility for meeting the educational needs of their students as well as sharing a greater emotional commitment to their activities through their "ownership" of them.

A third reason for school-based decision making is that it takes greater advantage of the available talent in the schools. The persistent concerns about improving the quality of the teaching force in American education ignore the fact that there is probably far more talent among existing classroom teachers than the schools are presently taking advantage of. Since there are few opportunities for classroom teachers and other school staff to affect the organization, curriculum, or the broad educational strategies imposed upon their schools, classroom teachers learn to ignore the obvious and to repress their ideas and suggestions. A productive school would do precisely the opposite by encouraging teachers to develop solutions to educational challenges and to present them in the overall decision forum as well as to adapt them to their own classroom situations. Many educators who have worked with teachers find an unusual wealth of productive

ideas among them, but the present mode of school organization stifles such initiative and underutilizes the talent of the school-based teaching force.

In order to create an effective school-based approach to decision making, it is necessary to satisfy four criteria: (1) accountability; (2) wide scope of discretion; (3) group and individual incentives; and (4) appropriate information.

(1) Accountability

The first requirement is that schools have clearly pictured goals and be held accountable for them. This means that the school board and school district, on the one hand, and individual schools, on the other, agree on the priorities for each school as well as on a system for measuring progress towards meeting these objectives. Such objectives may include not only standards of student achievement, but also rules for student attendance and participation in school activities, parental participation, reductions in student vandalism, and dropout rates at the secondary level. Each of these should be associated with an approach to measurement that is suitable and feasible, and annual assessments of these dimensions should be made to evaluate school performance.

(2) Wide Scope of Discretion

In order to address these goals, the school will need a wide scope of discretion in making decisions. Clearly, there may be limits to that discretion established by district policies and collective bargaining agreements, but these should still allow a substantial range for decision making at the school level. To a very large extent the staff of the school must have the discretionary power to make decisions over major aspects of school organization such as student grouping policies, instructional strategies, specific approaches to curriculum, and instructional materials. The power to use the talent and commitment of school staff to address the goals of the school will require the ability to make major
decisions that will determine outcomes. It will also require access to resources and the ability to allocate those resources in accordance with decisions.

(3) Incentives

The school and its personnel must be provided with incentives for reaching goals. These incentives can be symbolic in the form of public awards and praise, financial in the form of bonuses for personnel or additional resources for the school program, and intrinsic in the form of a high level of professional comraderie. All three types of incentives should be considered. There is reason to believe that intrinsic satisfactions of school staff will rise in relation to the degree to which they have the power and supportive conditions to make important decisions about their own activities. Other incentives can be constructed to meet the special needs of individual schools and their particular goals. For example, monetary rewards for schools can be provided in the form of discretionary funds according to their degree of success in meeting goals mutually determined between schools and the central district.

(4) Information

Good decisions can only be made when decision makers possess useful information on alternatives, their consequences, and requirements for implementation. Thus, provision must be made to provide such information to schools to enhance their decision making capacity. To a large degree, this type of service will become the responsibility of the school district, since such information capabilities benefit from a large measure of centralization and economies of scale. Information must be available not only in written form such as descriptions of alternative programs or evaluations; but, it must also be available in a consultative form in which experts can interact with school decision makers to inform them of alternatives and requirements for implementation.

A Specific Approach

Using these principles, we have begun to work with the following model among elementary schools committed to becoming Accelerated Schools.[7] This most important initial step is to transform the school into one in which the school staff and other pertinent participants can take responsibility for educational outcomes and make the necessary decisions for the improvement and maintenance of school programs. The focus would be on working collaboratively to solve problems rather than to focus blame. A similar approach was used very successfully by James Comer (1980) and his associates to drastically improve educational results for Black students in New Haven.

We have found that three levels of participation are necessary to encompass the range of issues that must be addressed in a democratic, but productive way: the school as a whole; the steering committee; and task or policy committees.

The School as a Whole (SAW) refers to the principal, teachers, teachers' aides, other instructional staff, and parent representatives. (At the secondary level, it should also include student representatives.) The SAW is required to approve all major decisions on curriculum, instruction, and resource allocation that have implications for the entire school as an organization. At the opposite extreme are the task and policy committees. These represent small groups organized around particular areas of concern for the school such as subject areas, personnel, or particular school problems. Where the concern is a continuing one such as personnel selection and evaluation, assessment, or parent participation, a standing committee would be formed. In the case where the concern is episodic, such as the planning of new facilities, an ad hoc committee would be formed that would be disbanded when the task was complete. The major guideline for forming committees would be to empanel as few people as possible, always looking to combine related responsibilities and to dissolve committees that are no longer needed.

The committees are where most of the work gets done such as obtaining information, considering alternatives, and making recommendations to the Steering Committee (SC). Committees build on the comraderie, ease of communication, and motivation associated with small teams working together.

The Steering Committee consists of the principal and representative teachers, aides, other school staff, and parents. The purpose of the Steering Committee is to appoint the committees and monitor their progress and to develop a set of recommendations for consideration of the School as a whole. Steering Committee members can be elected, or they can be composed of representatives of the committees with rotating membership over time to give all persons a chance to serve. The Steering Committee could approve any matter that did not have school-wide implications such as the establishment of a new course. In contrast, school-wide decisions would have to be submitted to a vote of the school as a whole. As guidelines for scheduling meetings, the committees would meet on a weekly basis, the Steering Committee on a bi-weekly basis, and the School as a Whole on a monthly basis. Meetings of all entities would require the public display of agendas at least 24 hours in advance and minutes of meeting within 48 hours following.

The principal in such a school has very unusual leadership responsibilities. First, the principal would be a major agent for identifying problem areas and calling them to the attention of the Steering Committee. Second, the principal would be responsible for facilitating decision making by the various groups, assisting in group dynamics and in obtaining pertinent information. Third, the principal would help to implement school decisions by securing the necessary resources.

School districts would play a greater service role for individual schools than they do presently. Particularly important would be the provision of information on alternatives for addressing specific problems identified by the school. Other areas for providing technical services would be in the areas of assessment, curriculum, evaluation, and staff development. District staff would serve in these roles as consultants to individual schools with a strong client orientation. Comer (1980) has stressed especially the use of human service professionals working with school personnel to build school programs on the basis of home experiences and student strengths.

A major portion of the individual school's budget would be allocated at the discretion of the individual school. Beyond the normal staff requirements which would be funded at the district level, additional staff could be funded from the budget of the individual school. The school would also be able to hire its own consultants and purchase instructional materials and other supplies. Budgetary allocations for staff development would also be under the control of the individual school.

These changes would be to empower schools with large numbers of educationally disadvantaged students to accelerate the education of their students by taking responsibility for meeting such goals within a framework of accountability to communities and the larger society. We stress this mechanism because it is the basic vehicle to bring about the transformation to accelerated schools. The other features of the Accelerated School from the establishment of goals to curriculum to instructional strategies cannot be effectively addressed without this full participation and commitment of school staff.

V. GETTING STARTED

Previous sections detailed the case for a new approach to creating schools for the disadvantaged, the features of the Accelerated School, and the outlines of the new organizational arrangements. In this section, I will suggest some ideas to assist individual schools become Accelerated Schools. These ideas are partially drawn from experiences with the two pilot schools that are part of the Accelerated Schools Project.

Selecting Schools

Much of the strategy for creating an Accelerated School movement is to establish individual schools within school districts and to use these to extend the concepts and practices to other schools within those districts. In this way one can create an initial Accelerated School as a model for other district schools as well as training ground to prepare personnel to assist other schools to move in this direction at a later time. One question that arises is what type of school to select. Since the district administration will select the school, it is important to provide district administrators with a clear picture of what will be attempted and what would be desirable in terms of a school choice. The district must also be informed about the school-based decision making requirement.

On the basis of our experiences, we recommend that the school be relatively small (600 or fewer students), that it have a heavy concentration of disadvantaged students, and that it have a principal committed to the disadvantaged and open to a radically new approach. Size is particularly important since it will be necessary to work with the entire school. In some cities elementary schools have enrollments of 1000 students or even more. In those cases, it may be necessary to form two or more "schools-within-a-school" that share facilities and some personnel, but that are distinct organizational units that staff and students can identify with. A supportive and capable principal is also an important building-block for success. Other things being equal, it is desirable to select a school with a very high proportion of disadvantaged students and very low achievement – even the most "difficult" school in the district. Success with such schools will

provide evidence likely to be persuasive in expanding the movement to other schools within the district.

Initial Contacts

Even though the district will select a particular school, it does not mean that the staff of that school will be committed to the notion of change, generally, and Accelerated Schools, particularly. Often teachers are skeptical about new approaches, having gone through many episodes of new curricula, staff retraining, educational technologies, and so on. Accordingly, we have found that the staff must be given time to become familiar with the concept of the Accelerated School and its various dimensions. At the same time, it is important to develop a relation of trust between the principal and teachers, on the one hand, and those who will assist in the implementation of the changes, on the other. Ultimately, the members of the school staff should be asked to indicate their commitment to the program on the basis of a secret ballot. If there is strong support from school staff, the program can begin with enthusiastic support and great energy. If support is weak, the school may not be appropriate or more time may be needed to familiarize staff with the potential of the Accelerated School and the benefits to staff as well as students.

Although this process is time-consuming, it is necessary to obtain a productive collaboration. The teachers should not feel forced into the project through a directive from above. The period of familiarizing the staff with the Accelerated School agenda can be used to great advantage. Classroom observations and discussions with the principal, teachers, and parents can reveal both the strengths of and challenges for the school which can be incorporated into the Accelerated School Plan. Both formal presentations and informal discussions with school personnel can also build a relation of trust and comraderie that will provide a foundation for working together. This initial process may take several months, hopefully followed by a strong affirmative vote to participate.

First Activities

Once the school has made its commitment, it is important to build on that momentum. We have found that one effective vehicle is to establish a weekend retreat or one-day staff development session devoted to the "vision" of the Accelerated School. Using large and small group exercises, the school participants are asked to set out a vision of the school, five years hence. These visions are developed in the small groups and brought together for presentation to the full assembly. A similar approach is used to set out the major obstacles to reaching that vision. From that list of obstacles, the first problem-solving committees are formed to address those problems with the highest priorities. Participants volunteer for committee membership, and a representative of each group is asked to join the steering committee along with the principal. Thus, an effective retreat can bring the school together around a vision as well as setting out an initial governing structure to work towards that vision.

Challenges

The establishment and maintenance of this process is not trouble-free. Many challenges will be encountered. The first is that school staff have had very few participative and cooperative experiences. Initially, there may be a tendency for the committees to be characterized by "griping" rather than a focus on the task. Our experience is that it is necessary to get over this stage by allowing it to transpire; at some point the gripes fade away and the serious work begins. There may also be tendencies for factions to develop around issues, a schism that mirrors other past conflicts in the school. The main solution is to get a group facilitator (principal, consultant, or group member) to gently focus the group on the task and agenda, and overtime the staff will learn

to work together. Staff development in working-in-groups and group facilitation is also important in this initial phase.

A second challenge to obtain time for the discussions and meetings. Most elementary schools set out work schedules for staff that provide little opportunity beyond classroom responsibilities for planning and renewal. The shift to an accelerated school program requires staff time for meetings, staff development, discussion, reflection, and exploration of alternatives.

This additional time requires new resources and new forms of school organization. Resources to support substitute teachers and other personnel to free-up staff time can be obtained from the school district and from outside sources such as educational foundations.

School districts can also arrange special music, science, and sports days during which a special team of educators, scientists, artists, or athletes can be brought to the school to create an exciting thematic program, while most of the regular school personnel participate in staff development activities. Several hours of meeting or planning time on a given day can also be created by special assemblies in which educational films are shown or other events are arranged through businesses or community agencies such as those promoting ecology. The provision of additional time often requires imagination and creativity to create rich educational programs while freeing-up time of administrators, teachers, and aides. State legislatures should also be encouraged to provide funding for the planning and renewal for Accelerated Schools.

Time is also required to transform a conventional school into an Accelerated School. In our experience, the first year should be devoted to a shift in school governance to create full participation in problem-solving and decision making. During this period, school staff learn how to function in a collaborative way as well how to set priorities among school challenges and how to address them in a constructive way. It is also a period during which school staff are likely to experience an explosion of good ideas to address the specific issues that have been set out in the first year.

During the second year, these activities will continue, but it is also necessary to implement those solutions that have been accepted by school staff, while allowing new priorities to emerge. For example, the School may focus on the language program, assessment, and parent involvement during the first year and begin to implement new approaches to these challenges in the second year while addressing a new set of issues. In some cases, it may be desirable to make changes first for the lower grades. Changes in the upper grades can be made in subsequent years. In other cases, it may be desirable to make changes in all grades at the same time.

As Figure One shows, there are a considerable number of dimensions that must be addressed to create an Accelerated School. We believe that the full transformation is likely to take about six years. At that point, the School should continue to function as an Accelerated School changing and adjustments in response to problems that may arise through the internal governance mechanism.

Technical Assistance and Information

The Accelerated School will require technical assistance and information, both in its formative years and on a continuing basis. For example, information will be required on alternatives, their advantages and disadvantages, evaluation results in other settings, and their logistical and staff development requirements. Technical assistance will be needed to assist school staff to establish governance mechanisms, facilitate group dynamics and decision making, staff development, and implementation. Our experience suggests that most administrators and teachers lack the backgrounds to consider alternatives in a problem-solving context. For example, a discussion of the language program in elementary schools will often focus on the need to

change the basal reading series rather than on consideration of an overall program for language that builds on oral language, writing, and a literature-based reading approach. In this context, technical support personnel and consultants can open a wide vista of alternatives that the school can consider to address its problems.

It is particularly important that such technical assistance and information be provided within the overall framework of the goals and processes of Accelerated Schools. Within this framework it is important to involve school staff in debating and discussing the issues rather than the more traditional approach of proposing "teacher-proof" packages for curriculum or instructional change. Such technical assistance can be obtained in the short run from outside consultants and employees of the school district. In the long run it is important for school districts to provide these services to individual schools on a client-oriented basis. These capabilities can be enhanced considerably in districts that establish Accelerated Schools, for the experiences garnered in one school will provide the expertise to work with other schools in the district.

Pre-Service Training

Most pre-service training programs for administrators and teachers do not address the preparation of personnel who will be effective in Accelerated Schools. Such programs lack sufficient training experiences in problem-solving, group dynamics, internal school assessment, participative governance, and a wide variety of other skills central to the functioning of these schools. In the short run, these deficiencies can be overcome through in-service staff development and participative experiences among school staff. However, in the long run it is important to incorporate these skills into training programs for school administrators and teachers. It will also be valuable for Accelerated Schools to work closely with colleges and universities to provide sites for administrative and teaching internships. These arrangements can also augment the resources of
Accelerated Schools by adding trainees to their staffs.

A Clearing-House

The Accelerated School Project of the Center for Educational Research at Stanford University (CERAS) is developing a clearing-House on the Accelerated School. The purpose of this activity is to provide research, information, and training programs to support the Accelerated School movement. Research will focus on organizational and educational processes that advance our understanding of how to accelerate educational development, particularly for disadvantaged students.

The dissemination program will research papers; put out a newsletter on Accelerated Schools with research findings, identify new sites and exemplary practices; and make available practitioner reports from the schools themselves that inform the movement. In addition, there will be regional and national conferences and an electronic network that Accelerated Schools can contact to get information quickly on curriculum, programs, assessment, parental involvement, and other aspects of Accelerated Schools. The training program will work with colleges and universities and the Regional Educational Laboratories to create a capacity for pre-service training and staff development in all parts of the country.

Footnotes

1. Details of the arguments and supporting evidence for this section can be found in Levin (1986).

2. For an excellent survey of research results on educational interventions for disadvantaged students, see Peterson 1986.

3. This approach shares important aspects such as high expectations and a focus on the entire school with the "Effective Schools" approach. However, it also differs considerably, especially in its emphasis on a staff-based decision model rather than the delegation of all decision authority to the "instructional leader." See Edmonds 1979 and Purkey and Smith 1973 for information on the Effective Schools Movement.

4. Romberg (1986) provides an excellent review of issues pertaining to mathematics programs for disadvantaged students.

5. Calfee and his colleagues have created an approach to language that builds on the upgrading staff capabilities to make decisions and implement productive language programs. See Barton and Calfee 1987 and Calfee and Henry 1986.

6. An important review of the effectiveness of various instructional strategies for students-at-risk is found in Madden and Slavin (1987) and Slavin and Madden (1987). These reviews emphasize both "pull-out" programs and classroom programs. However, they do not address the central thrust of Accelerated Schools which is to focus all programs on the needs of disadvantaged students in a reinforcing and symbiotic way in the context of a staff-based decision model. Rather, their analysis is done on a program-by-program basis without consideration of mutually supportive and cumulative effects of programs.

7. Major credit for the implementation process and the lessons we have learned from it must go to a talented group of my colleagues: These include Brenda Letendre and Bob Polkinghorn who serve as the heads of the two Stanford teams working with the two pilot schools and John Rogers, Claire Smrekar, Marc Ventresca, and Shelby Wolfe.

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